

Beaconhill Community First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122193
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	301743
Inspection dates	12–13 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	191
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Harrison
Headteacher	Mrs Amanda Forbes
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2003
School address	Langdale Drive Beacon Hill Grange Cramlington Northumberland NE23 8EH
Telephone number	01670 714864
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size First school, which is to extend to a primary school in September 2007, when current Year 4 pupils will move into Year 5. Almost all pupils are from White British heritage groups and all have English as their first language. The area served by the school is one of economic disadvantage and this is reflected in the above average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, though a higher proportion than usual has a statement of special educational need. The attainment of children when they start school is very low compared to that typical of three-year-olds, with particular weaknesses in speech and language development and mathematical development. The school recently gained the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that has made good improvement since its last inspection. Standards and rates of progress are rising and pupils' achievement is good. Children make good progress from very low starting points in the Nursery because the Foundation Stage provision is good, despite some shortcomings in provision for outdoor learning. Standards at the end of Year 2 vary, but are usually close to average, except for this year. While standards in the current Year 2 are lower than usual at well below average, these pupils have made good progress from their very low starting points at the end of Reception. Since the last inspection, Year 4 standards have been close to those expected for pupils this age, but are lower this year because of the higher than usual proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties. Nonetheless, they have made good progress given their starting points in Year 3.

Good quality teaching and a well planned, rich curriculum help to raise standards and increase pupils' enjoyment of learning. Teachers are alert to the needs of children and encourage them to become independent learners. They make good use of targets so that children know what is expected of them in lessons. Children work hard and are enthusiastic about the many different learning opportunities they have in and out of school.

The pastoral care for pupils is excellent. Staff know the pupils well. Their care and support for pupils' well-being ensures that they feel safe, secure and happy. Because of this, pupils develop good attitudes to learning; they behave well and show kindness and consideration for each other. Pupils willingly take on responsibility and are rightly proud of their contribution to the development of the school. They have a good awareness of the need to help others in and out of school and know that their ideas will be listened to and taken seriously. Playground buddies and peer tutors act as good role models for younger children and give good support to learning and friendship. Pupils are adequately prepared for the next stage of learning through the many opportunities they have to develop basic skills and good personal qualities. Although the school has recently introduced new systems for tracking pupils' progress, these are not sufficiently embedded.

Very good leadership from the headteacher, well supported by the senior leadership team, has moved the school forward at a good rate since the last inspection. School self-evaluation is good at identifying areas for improvement and has planned the checking of pupils' progress as a priority this year. Preparations are well advanced for extending provision to Year 5 when the school achieves primary status in the autumn term; governors have been active and very supportive in helping this process succeed. Taking into account the clear vision of the headteacher and the improving skills of staff and governors, the school is well placed for its expansion and for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress throughout the school.
- Improve provision for outdoor learning for children in the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although standards are below average, pupils' achievement is good. There is no difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Children make good progress during the Foundation Stage

in all areas of learning. However, because of their very low starting points, sometimes less than half the children meet national expectations in literacy and numeracy.

Standards at the end of Year 2 this year are well below average in reading, writing and mathematics, and lower than those of last year. These standards reflect the lower starting points of these pupils when they joined Year 1. School data and inspection evidence indicate that the progress of these pupils has been good and that many more have reached the expected level for their age than predicted by their scores at the end of Reception.

Standards at the end of Year 4 have improved since the last inspection, but this year they are lower than usual. Nevertheless, pupils' progress from their results at the end of Year 2 is good. Progress in mathematics is slower than in reading and writing and the school has identified some weaknesses in provision that are already being tackled successfully.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils are friendly and polite. The secure environment helps them feel safe. They know they are cared for and there are grown ups they can talk to if upset or worried. Pupils emphasise that bullying now is rare but are confident that it is dealt with successfully if it occurs. They say that school 'is a friendly place to be'. They enjoy attending, say lessons are fun and 'you learn something new every day'. The school works hard to ensure that attendance is satisfactory overall, but a minority of parents do not send pupils as regularly as they should. Pupils behave well in lessons and work cooperatively in pairs or groups. The elected school council encourages healthier packed lunches. Pupils know their opinions are valued and are especially proud of raising £700 through donations to school clubs to buy goats for Africa. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for the world of work. Opportunities to take responsibilities, for example as playground buddies, or by peer tutoring are effective and help pupils develop and mature.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Most teachers plan learning activities that are well matched to the needs of individuals and groups, so that pupils are able to work independently and at a good pace. In a small number of lessons, where activities are not as well matched to pupils' individual needs, learning is satisfactory rather than good. Nevertheless, the improved use of assessment to help pupils make quicker progress is having a marked impact on standards this year. Marking is used effectively to move pupils' learning forward, but best practice is not yet consistent across the school. Teachers make good use of questions to assess learning and to develop pupils' thinking.

Pupils are increasingly involved in measuring their learning through assessing their own work in lessons and setting targets for future learning, this is increasing their confidence. Pupils say that learning is best when they have plenty of practical activities to learn from. In such lessons, pupils' concentration is sustained well and they are motivated to find out for themselves. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and gifted and talented pupils, are very well supported by skilled teaching assistants and teachers' careful planning for their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Planning for literacy and numeracy is good; it provides well for the needs of all pupils. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved well since the last inspection and, as a result, pupils' skills in this subject have improved. Initiatives to enhance pupils' learning and develop their interests and talents have included the introduction of French throughout the school and an extension to sports activities through the Sports' Coordinator Partnership. Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles, personal safety and relationships through science and physical education lessons, and a well planned personal, social, health and citizenship programme. The Foundation Stage curriculum is well planned so that there is a balance of learning through play and adult led learning. However, outdoor provision is not sufficiently developed to provide enough opportunities to support independent learning, especially in physical and creative play using large-scale apparatus and equipment.

The curriculum is enriched well by visits, for example to a Hindu temple, and visitors to the school who bring in a range of expertise and knowledge to extend the interests of pupils. After-school clubs have developed very well in response to requests from pupils. This provision is now good and clubs are very well supported.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall. Pastoral care is excellent. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and any who do not speak English at home benefit from well targeted personal support, which enables them to play a full part in lessons and make good progress. Good use is made of external agencies and specialists to help vulnerable children. The school is also very supportive in giving short-term help to children and their families in crisis; for example, in bereavement. Child protection, risk assessments and health and safety procedures are in place. Systems for monitoring pupils' progress are not yet efficient or comprehensive enough to pick up all weaknesses quickly, such as the slower progress of pupils in mathematics. The school is currently working on improving such systems. Most teachers support pupils' progress well through accurate assessment of their learning and by ensuring that additional support is provided when necessary. To further improve this, senior managers are developing a mapping system to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions used. The school makes good efforts to work with families and keep them informed through weekly newsletters and parents' evenings. This is a school that cares; as the logo clearly says 'Where Children Matter'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school has improved well since the last inspection under the leadership of the recently appointed headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team. She has set a clear course to raise standards and improve the quality of educational provision and has won the support of staff, governors and parents to her aims. Governors are experienced, expert and very supportive of the school.

Since the last inspection there has been good development of the roles of senior staff and governors in monitoring the work of the school. Self-evaluation is good; it identifies the most significant weaknesses and further improvements for monitoring and evaluation are planned as a priority this year. Where weaknesses have been identified, the school has responded quickly and effectively to bring about improvement, for example, in improvements to reading in the current year.

The school forges good links with parents and external agencies to support pupils' learning. Parents are pleased with the good communications between home and school and that their views are taken into account.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 June 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Beaconhill Community First School, Cramlington, NE23 8EH

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed finding out about your school and how well you are doing in your learning.

Your school is a very happy one and you told us that you felt safe and well looked after. We agree that your headteacher and teachers work hard to make school a friendly and safe place for you and that they look after you extremely well.

We were very pleased to see how hard you all work and how well behaved you are around the school. You have lovely manners and know it is important to be kind and considerate to each other. We thought that your idea for raising money to help the school council make improvements to the school was a good one - but what really knocked us out was that you are kind enough to give half of this money to help people in Africa have a better life. That shows you are developing into really good and caring citizens who understand the needs of others. Your work in the school hall showed us you have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy so you really are learning a lot about your world and how you fit into it.

We think that the extra help some of you have had this year has made a big difference to your reading and writing and mathematics. We have suggested to your headteacher and teachers that they should keep on helping you all to get better at these things by looking very closely at the progress each one of you is making as you move through the school. You can help too by continuing to work hard and do your best. We also thought that more outdoor activities might be helpful for children in the Nursery and Reception classes and have suggested this too.

Thank you again for making us so welcome and giving us the chance to find out that yours is a good school.

Our very best wishes for the future to you all!

Yours sincerely

Mrs Moira Fitzpatrick and Mrs Wendy Richardson

Inspectors